



THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY



s around the world.

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours! (Luke 2:14)*

At Christmas we lift our voices to join with the angels in heaven's song of praise. The account told by St Luke fills us with the hope and joy of God's promise, now fulfilled in the incarnate Christ.

However, for many Christian brothers and sisters around the world, particularly those who face persecution and oppression, much is against them finding peace amidst the encircling darkness. Many of us in good places sometimes may find it difficult to experience the presence of God in the course of our ordinary lives.

But at Christmas, God breaks into the ordinary. He does not come as an Emperor or King – not as people would recognise, anyway – he comes born to ordinary parents, to live a 'normal' life. He doesn't come as one with the trappings of power; he comes as one who saves and serves. He does not come as a warrior in this place of occupation in the Middle East; but as helpless child, wrapped in cloth by his mother.

Yet, in the midst of this conflict and oppression, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. And in the middle of a humble stable, amongst shepherds - lowest of the low - who arrive empty handed, whilst the world continued its rotation through the night, this child's face is the true glory and power of God. It is the foolishness of God to answer the power of darkness with a vulnerable baby in a war-torn country born to poor parents. Yet that answer is the true wisdom of God, for here God - invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable – is translated into a sign and a substantial reality that the simplest human being can grasp and before whom the wisest scholars find themselves falling in worship (I Corinthians 1:20).

The angels who proclaim this glory in Luke's Gospel overflow out of the Heavens. The triumph of what God has done for us cannot be contained. Let us too, no matter our trials and our challenges, continue to proclaim joyously as we remember the birth of our saviour: 'Glory to God in heaven!' Let us too, in the face of trouble and conflict, declare peace upon all who he favours! Every tear brings the Messiah closer!

God's favour is offered to all, not forced upon some. There is nothing we can do to earn this boundless grace of God. We can merely open ourselves humbly to receive it.

Christ breaks into this suffering, complicated, divided world, and unites all of heaven and earth in wonder at his birth. I pray we too might share the same wonder this year: for through him we have been given salvation, we who could not save ourselves. And through him we have hope, who once felt hopeless and lost. Through him we are renewed in love for one another and may ourselves be living translations of the mystery of the Trinitarian God.

Through the Christ-child we see God's faithfulness. Through his Son, God has fulfilled his promise to us: we can trust in him and him alone.

The early church father, St Augustine, writes:

'...let us be at peace with God: for justice and peace have embraced one another. Through our Lord Jesus Christ: for Truth has arisen from the earth. Through whom we have access to that grace in which we stand, and our boast is in our hope of God's glory.'

The glory is indeed God's, not ours, so we have no boast but Christ. But may we be illuminated by his glory this Christmas, so we can shine as lights for him, witnessing with joy to him who has brought justice and hope, glory and peace.

This Christmas, my prayer is that the joy of the extraordinary God may transform our ordinary lives. In his birth and life, suffering and death, resurrection and glorious ascension he calls us out of darkness together, and into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

In his peace and glory,

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

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